



STATE OF IOWA

TERRY E. BRANSTAD
GOVERNOR

KIM REYNOLDS
LT. GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF DRUG CONTROL POLICY
STEVEN F. LUKAN, DIRECTOR

News

For Immediate Release

Thursday, November 13, 2014

Contact:

Dale Woolery (515) 725-0310 or

dale.woolery@iowa.gov

New Iowa Drug Control Strategy Includes Focus on Prescription Drugs and Heroin

DES MOINES – The 2015 Iowa Drug Control Strategy, an annual report to the Governor and Legislature, shows significant progress in preventing drug abuse, while also recognizing current and emerging challenges that include medicine misuse and heroin use.

“Although Iowa remains one of the safest states in the U.S., in terms of having one of the nation’s lowest rates of illegal drug use, too many Iowa families are negatively impacted by drug use and crime,” said Steve Lukan, Director of the Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP). “One of the fastest growing areas of substance use disorders involves prescription drugs, which may also be driving an increase in heroin use.”

Prescription pain relievers and heroin are in the same class of drugs, known as opioids. Professionals who treat substance use disorders increasingly report Iowans who begin taking pain pills for legitimate health problems become addicted to the medication over time, and eventually switch to heroin when they can no longer afford the medicine.

According to data in the ODCP report, Iowa’s prescription pain medicine related overdose deaths and substance abuse treatment admissions have risen in recent years. So too have heroin related overdose deaths and treatment entries, as well as opiate-related emergency room visits.

Opioid/Narcotic OD Deaths	11 in 2003	*77 in 2013	+600%
Heroin OD Deaths	1 in 2003	*20 in 2013	+1,900%

*Signifies highest level on record in Iowa (since 1992).

“Both pain medicine and heroin can be dangerous—even lethal—if abused, which is why preventing prescription drug abuse in the first place must be a priority,” said Lukan. “One way to do this is through continuing education for health care professionals, parents and children.”

“Iowa’s Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) is an important health care tool, and the more it’s used the more patients can be assured of taking medicines properly,” said Lukan.

“Medication Take Back events also play a key role to help Iowans safely dispose of unused prescription drugs in a way that prevents abuse and protects the environment.”

The PMP was recently enhanced to require out-of-state pharmacies dispensing medicines in Iowa to report those transactions, and work is underway to securely share prescription information with neighboring states. Still, less than a third of Iowa prescribers are registered to access the PMP, and fewer actually use it. The most recent Take Back effort in September collected over four tons of unused medicines. During the last four years, Iowans have safely discarded more than 25 tons of obsolete prescription drugs. Education continues on this subject, in the form of professional training and public awareness (e.g., <http://www.IowaMedicineTLC.org>).

Other signs of progress noted in the new Iowa drug control report:

- Meth labs reported by Iowa law enforcement are down again in 2014, and on a pace to total 172, which would be their lowest point in 17 years.
- Drug-related Iowa prison admissions decreased for a second straight year last year to 867, and are down about 22% from the recent high water mark of 1,110 in 2004.
- Nearly 60% of Iowa clients completing substance abuse treatment in 2013 were employed full or part-time and 87% were arrest free, both considerably higher than pre-treatment rates.
- Iowa's 20 drug enforcement task forces referred 300 drug-endangered children for protective services and removed 598 firearms from alleged drug dealers and gang members last year.
- Rates of underage drinking and tobacco use have steadily declined in Iowa over the last decade, and illegal drug use by youth has remained nearly steady.

Other challenges noted in the report:

- The amounts, potency and use of meth smuggled into Iowa are increasing. The 64,000 grams of meth seized by Iowa law enforcement so far this year is the largest volume in nine years, dating back to 2005. Meth-related prison admissions totaled 475 last year, making up over half of all Iowa drug-related prison admissions. Meth treatment admissions last year comprised 14.8% of all publicly-funded treatment entries, an all-time high percentage involving meth.
- Iowa drug-related child abuse cases, involving children testing positive for drugs and in the presence of meth manufacturing, rose to 1,334 last year, the highest level in five years.
- Iowa marijuana-related hospital emergency department visits increased to an all-time high of 949 last year, more double the number seven years earlier in 2006.
- Synthetic drugs, including those referred to as K2 and Bath Salts, continue to evolve in their makeup, posing a health threat to unsuspecting Iowa users.

The 2015 Iowa Drug Control Strategy outlines a comprehensive plan involving prevention, treatment and enforcement efforts aimed at reducing illegal drug use and promoting healthy and safe communities. To view the complete report, go to www.iowa.gov/odcp.

###